



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

Nature Strategy

2025 – 2035



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Foreword

Welcome to Westmorland and Furness Council's first Nature Strategy, which has been developed following the Shadow Authority's biodiversity declaration in September 2022 and the publication of Cumbria's first Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) in autumn 2025.

Nature and Biodiversity plays a key role in shaping our places and spaces across Westmorland and Furness. It defines our landscape, supports the local visitor economy and the way we produce our food, and is a natural asset for our communities. Healthy natural ecosystems also deliver improved services for people, from clean air and water, to climate regulation and adaptation, and access to nature for improved health, wellbeing and recreation, meaning a biodiverse landscape isn't just good for nature but it's good for us too.

Unfortunately like the rest of the UK, Westmorland and Furness has experienced an ongoing and significant loss of biodiversity due to pressures such as habitat degradation and fragmentation, invasive species, changing agricultural practices, pollution and climate change. As a young council, Westmorland and Furness are in a unique position; we can prioritise nature recovery from the outset. This Nature Strategy links closely to the Council's Climate Change Action Plans, the upcoming Climate Adaptation Strategy and the Council Plan to support the wider benefits of biodiversity. It ensures that Westmorland and Furness Council are able to embed environmental considerations in everything we do and both lead on and support nature recovery efforts.

This Nature Strategy sets out our approach to nature recovery in Westmorland and Furness through a programme of actions that will halt and begin to reverse the decline in biodiversity and create an area that is rich in wildlife. It focuses primarily on the Council's own assets such as our parks, open spaces and cemeteries, as well as embedding nature in key policies such as local planning policies to prioritise wildlife through the creation of new developments and spaces for our residents.

We can't achieve this alone. We will work in collaboration with partners to create joined-up habitat networks that allow native species to flourish.

We are excited to deliver actions to directly support nature and biodiversity across Westmorland and Furness. By putting nature recovery at the heart of council operations, we will ensure Westmorland and Furness is a great place for both nature and people to thrive together.



Cllr Giles Archibald, Cabinet Member for Climate, Biodiversity and Environmental Services



Introduction

What is biodiversity and nature?

Biodiversity can be defined as the variety of life on earth, including all living organisms, their genetic diversity, and the ecosystems they inhabit. In other words, biodiversity is the part of nature that is alive; it includes all species of animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms like bacteria that make up our natural world. Nature is all the existing systems created at the same time as the Earth, including all the features, forces and processes. Essentially, nature is all life on Earth (i.e. biodiversity), together with the geology, water, climate and all other natural components that comprise our planet.

Nature holds deep cultural significance. It not only provides a sense of place but also offers endless opportunities for recreation and inspiration amid our diverse landscapes. It plays a pivotal role in fostering spiritual and religious connections, shaping our identity, and influencing how we perceive the world and one another.

The UK is home to over 70,000 species of plants, animals and fungi, and includes globally significant populations and internationally important habitats. Whilst we may be known for our countryside and green spaces, an analysis from the State of Nature Report (2023)¹ estimates that due to human activity, the UK has lost around half of its biodiversity since the Industrial Revolution, based on abundance and species richness. This makes the UK one of the most depleted countries for biodiversity in the world. Some examples of decline in UK biodiversity are:

- The abundance of freshwater and terrestrial species has fallen by 19% since 1970 (based on an analysis of 753 species).
- The distributions of invertebrate species have contracted by an average of 13% since 1970.
- Since 1970, 54% of flowering plant species have decreased in distribution
- The abundance of 13 species of seabird has fallen by an average of 24% since 1986.

The reasons for the decline in biodiversity are often multi-faceted and complex. Climate change, land use and human activity are all putting significant pressures on nature and leading to the decline and fragmentation of species and habitats.

Fortunately, plenty can be done to begin to reverse the decline in biodiversity, and Westmorland and Furness Council will aim to be at the forefront of supporting nature recovery and conservation, and the challenges that may appear.

What do we mean by nature recovery?

In general, nature recovery means to halt or reverse the decline in the number and range of habitats and species; it often includes restoring natural processes at a landscape scale. This is done primarily by either managing and enhancing existing habitats, or expanding and creating new areas of habitat to support the native species that live there. This could also include specific actions to benefit a particular species, or controlling invasive non-native species to allow others to flourish.

¹State of Nature Partnership (2023) State of Nature 2023. Available at stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf [13.05.2025].



Ecologically Aware

Westmorland and Furness Council has highlighted the importance of the decline in biodiversity by declaring a biodiversity crisis. This declaration states that the Council must act to restore natural habitats, restrict invasive species and reduce pollution. As the responsible authority for Cumbria's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, we are well positioned to be able to embed nature recovery priorities and measures into our internal processes, aligning with national policies and supporting the work of local initiatives to deliver meaningful projects.

The Council Plan priority and vision to be a leader in the drive to address biodiversity loss and become carbon net zero by 2037 will be supported by actions to encourage better land management and biodiversity net gain in new developments.

Our Council Plan Delivery Framework² (Figure 1) shows how the missions are grounded in the three sustainability pillars of equity, economy and the environment. We will align our nature recovery actions with the Annual Plan³ and Operating Model to drive an effective service with a community focus; we will enhance our natural environment in line with the Cumbria LNRS to create better quality spaces and places in good condition for both nature and people to thrive in.

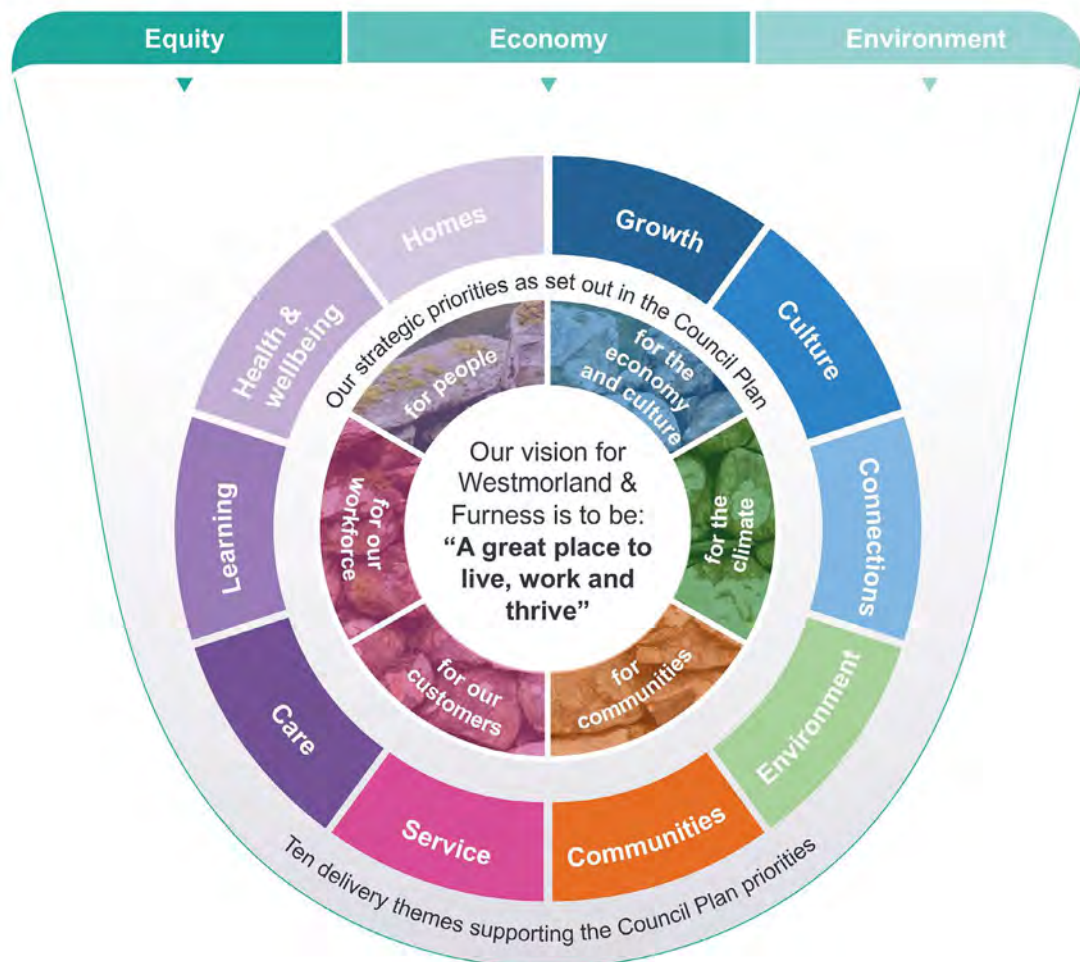


Figure 1: Westmorland and Furness Council's strategic priorities and delivery themes, as established in the Council Plan.

²Westmorland and Furness Council (2024) Council Plan Delivery Framework 2024/25 Update. Available at: [WFC Council Plan Delivery Framework 2024 to 2025 update. pp v10.pdf](#) [13.05.2025].

³Westmorland and Furness Council (2025) Annual Plan. Available at: [Appendix+1+for+CAB+1803+-+Council+Annual+Plan+202526.pdf](#) [13.05.2025].

- **Equity** – Tackling inequality to support fair and inclusive communities that offer opportunity for all, including in the natural environment.
- **Economy** – Increasing productivity, improving educational outcomes and developing workforce skills to support a vibrant, resilient economy that benefits everyone, supporting a sustainable landscape.
- **Environment** – Protecting our natural resources and tackling climate change and biodiversity loss to ensure a healthy, thriving environment for current and future generations.

One of Westmorland and Furness Council's seven values is to be 'Ecologically Aware'. In implementing this value, we will take a responsible approach to enhancing and restoring our natural environment across all council functions, embedding nature and biodiversity into council culture, and further supporting our Biodiversity Duty, which is placed on us as a local authority by law.

Our mission for the environment ensures our landscape positively impacts on health, wellbeing and the local economy. Together we can build our resilience and adapt to climate change, and take action to reverse the decline in biodiversity.

Partnership working

To achieve our vision of nature recovery and tackle biodiversity loss across Westmorland and Furness, we recognise the need to work with partners. We strongly believe that collaboration and partnership working are key mechanisms for conserving, protecting and enhancing biodiversity across the area through education, advice and raising awareness. The decline in biodiversity across the UK and Westmorland and Furness, as well as the potential to restore our varied and rich landscape, emphasises the importance of joined-up working. By pooling our resources, we can achieve even greater results that enhances and complements the delivery work of individual organisations, and the priorities and measures of the Cumbria LNRS.

As responsible authority for the Cumbria LNRS, Westmorland and Furness Council led on the development of the strategy, which included a breadth and depth of engagement activities with a wide range of individuals and organisations. This included extensive engagement activities with a diverse range of individuals and organisations with over 800 people directly involved in its development, which included surveys, workshops and feedback received via public consultation.

We are confident that the priorities and measures are not just evidence-based but also locally led, responding to both expert opinion and residents' priorities. Aligned to Lawton principles⁴ of 'more, bigger, better and joined', large-scale nature recovery will have a greater success through partnership working; delivering the Cumbria LNRS together with other partners will be key to reversing the decline in biodiversity in Cumbria.

⁴Lawton, J. H. et al. (2010) Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network. Available at: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130402151656/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf> [13.05.2025].

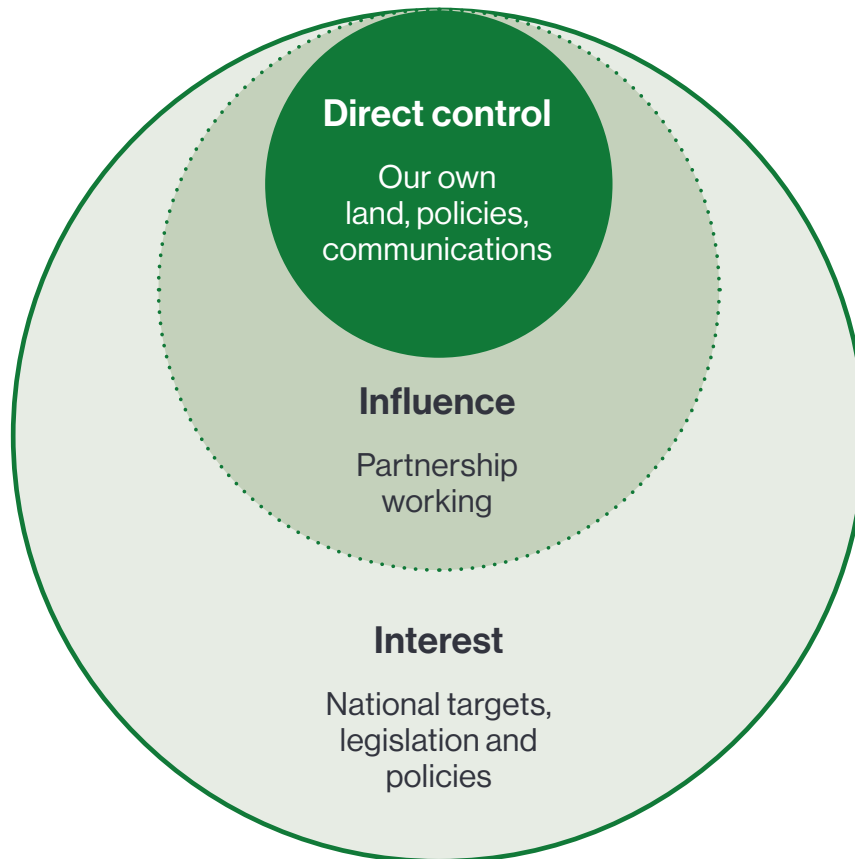


Figure 2: The spheres of influence the Council have over nature recovery.

We have strong links and relationships with a wide range of partners and stakeholders across Westmorland and Furness, including statutory bodies, non-government organisations, charities, community interest companies, and town and parish councils. We recognise the valuable role that these organisations play in meeting national biodiversity goals and the local contribution they make in increasing species abundance, and restoring and connecting habitats.

We are also members of key partnerships across Cumbria all working to reverse the decline in biodiversity, and as one of two local authorities in Cumbria, we play a key role in guiding and directing the focus, investment and delivery through these partnerships alongside other organisations.

Westmorland and Furness Council will endeavour to continue to support these partnerships to contribute towards joined-up and ambitious nature recovery and conservation across Cumbria aligned to the Cumbria LNRS.



Cumbria Local Nature Partnership

The Cumbria Local Nature Partnership (CLNP) is the Cumbria-wide strategic partnership for nature, established and confirmed by Government in 2012 under the Natural Environment White Paper 2011. It acts as a prominent and unified voice for the natural environment in Cumbria, advocating for nature across sectors and policy areas. The CLNP supports co-ordinated action for the natural environment through cross-sector working and interest groups aligned with the following priorities: nature recovery; data and skills; green growth; natural climate solutions; and the natural health service. As a local authority and partners in the CLNP, Westmorland and Furness Council support the work of the partnership to ensure any action has a consideration for the environment and maximises wider benefits.

The Morecambe Bay Local Nature Partnership (MBLNP) also covers the Cumbrian side of Morecambe Bay and their work overlaps with the CLNP. The MBLNP has an ambition to act as a catalyst for significantly improving the quality of the natural environment and connecting nature, businesses and communities. The Council is supportive of the MBLNP and the work the partnership does to champion nature and improve the quality of habitats around Morecambe Bay.

Zero Carbon Cumbria Partnership

Westmorland and Furness Council are working in partnership with the Zero Carbon Cumbria Partnership (ZCCP) which aims to achieve net-zero emissions by 2037 across all sectors including transport and mobility, buildings, and waste and consumption; most relevant to this strategy is our work with the 'Farming and Other Land Use' sector group. The group seeks to respond to sector-based emissions by increasing the natural sequestration potential of land managed for agriculture, peatlands, leisure and forestry, as well as wider opportunities to reduce emissions from agricultural operations.

The use of green land for business and recreation is widespread and steeped in tradition, diversity and challenges; sustainable management of land is crucial to its future. Success by 2037 requires a unified effort across a wide range of stakeholders, including the Council, to achieve a sustainable future for Cumbria. This will place food production at the core of land management delivered through a carefully balanced land use approach, which nurtures carbon storage, biodiversity and regenerating land.

Lake District National Park Partnership

Westmorland and Furness Council are one of 23 partners involved in the Lake District National Park Partnership. The partnership's aim is to work towards the vision of the park in the best interests of its environment, communities, economy and visitors, and to have the chance to share best practice. By coming together, the partners can ensure the National Park remains a place where a prosperous economy, world class visitor experiences and vibrant communities come together to sustain the spectacular landscape, its wildlife and cultural heritage.



Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan Partnership

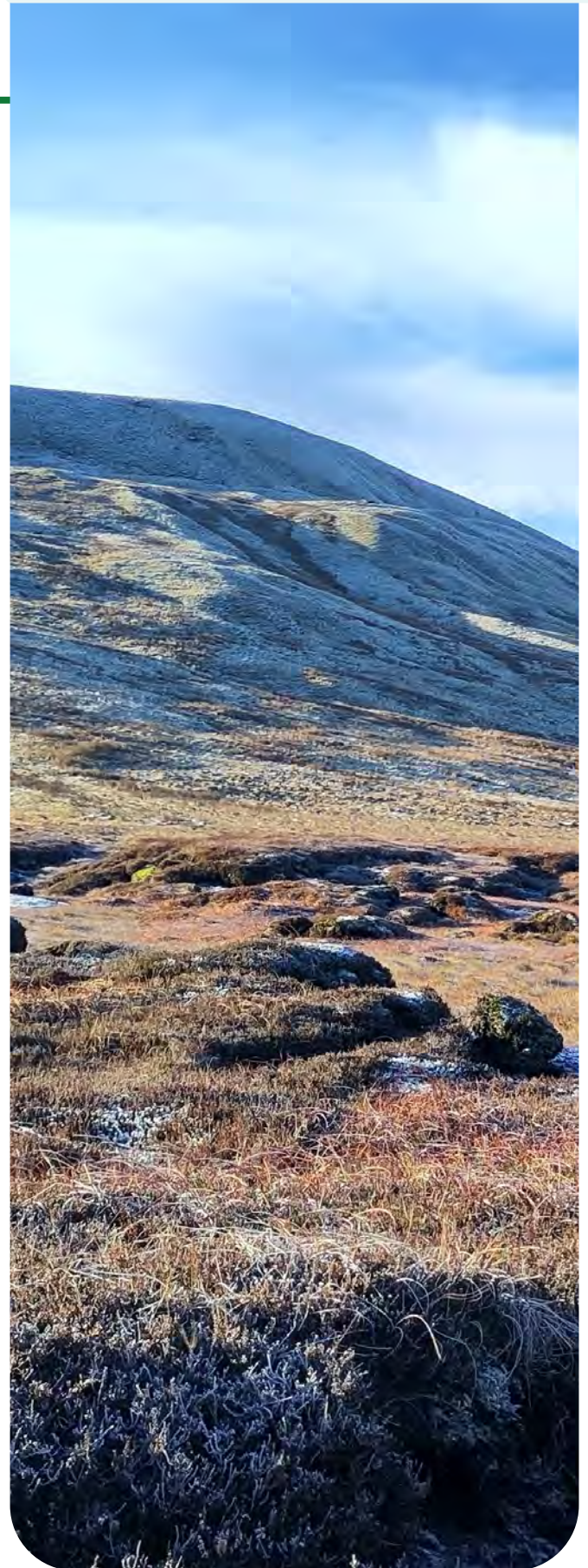
Westmorland and Furness Council is one of 17 partners involved in the Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan Partnership. The Partnership has set out six ambitions for what the National Park will be like in 2040, including making it home to the finest variety of wildlife in England, and making it resilient and responsive to the impacts of climate change, storing more carbon each year than it produces. Each ambition is supported by a series of specific objectives, led by 24 different organisations, and directly involving over 60 others.

Arnside and Silverdale National Landscape Partnership

Westmorland and Furness Council is a partner of the Arnside and Silverdale National Landscape Partnership along with Lancaster City Council and Lancashire County Council. The partnership also includes statutory agencies, voluntary bodies, parish councils, business user groups, landowners and farming representatives. The partnership works to enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the National Landscape, ensuring they can meet the challenges of the future.

North Pennines National Landscape Partnership

The North Pennines National Landscape partnership is an alliance of statutory agencies, local authorities and voluntary or community organisations which care about, and for, the area. It convenes all those with an interest in the area to focus on the purpose of designation, which is the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. The staff team is hosted by Durham County Council, on behalf of the funding partners, including Westmorland and Furness Council, Cumberland Council, Northumberland County Council and Defra.



Love Windermere Partnership

The Love Windermere Partnership is committed to protecting and revitalising Windermere Lake and its surrounding catchment. We are involved in all three workstreams: sewage, land management, and information. The aim of the partnership is four-fold:

1. Achieve a thriving water environment for Windermere Lake and its catchment, supporting a strong local community and economy that is prepared for our changing climate.
2. Keep local people and visitors informed about the impactful work being done by the Partnership and others to improve the water quality of Windermere Lake and its catchment.
3. Foster strong relationships with local communities, businesses, and visitors, instilling trust and confidence in the quality of the Windermere environment. The partnership will provide easy access to science, data and evidence from a variety of reliable sources, ensuring clarity and understanding for all.
4. Work collaboratively with local residents, visitors, businesses, and organisations to jointly address the impact of nutrients on water quality in Windermere and its catchment.

By working in partnership and bringing together expertise from diverse fields and listening to local voices, we can ensure that the strategies benefit the environment, community and economy of Windermere and its surrounding catchment, in line with the Council's strategic priorities.

Health and Care Partnerships

Our Climate and Natural Environment team are working closely with the Integrated Care Partnerships to collaborate on co-benefits and understand how work to address health and wellbeing and nature recovery efforts can complement each other. By linking together with our public health colleagues, and partners in Natural England and the National Health Service (NHS), we can collaboratively maximise the wider benefits to health and wellbeing from nature. The team are supporting various events and providing information for colleagues working in healthcare to inspire actions that both improve nature and health, for instance nature-friendly management of NHS estates and green social prescribing.



Raise

Raise operates throughout Cumbria, bringing together communities, landowners, policy makers and artists to co-create sustainable woodland in diverse landscapes to address the climate crisis and improve the health, wellbeing and opportunities of Cumbrian people. Raise have produced the Forest Plan for Cumbria Community Forest, which presents a long-term vision and the first five-year action plan for a major programme of tree and woodland establishment in Cumbria. The Council has been a key partner in the Cumbria Community Forest and adopted the plan in October 2025 to support our work with partners and support our tree planting objectives.

The importance of farmers, landowners, and land managers

Agriculture and land-based industries are a significant part of the local economy and help define the landscape and heritage of Cumbria. Westmorland and Furness Council wish to support our farming communities to have a positive impact on the environment through partnership working that not only benefits nature but supports the economic viability of Cumbrian farming.

Farming and landownership are central to Cumbria's landscape, economy, and environment. Farmers manage over 70% of the land in Cumbria⁵, shaping the region's culture and heritage, and playing a vital role in conserving habitats, maintaining biodiversity, and supporting rural communities. Their involvement is essential for delivering joined-up nature recovery and meeting climate goals through practices like woodland creation and peatland restoration. As custodians of the land, they are key partners in sustainable land management and the future resilience of our natural environment.

Efforts to support nature recovery on agricultural land benefit biodiversity as well as bringing multiple benefits to the landowner and the land itself. Sustainable farming methods (for instance regenerative techniques, maximum sustainable yield models, smaller volume – higher margin models and increased uptake in Agri-Environment Schemes) can help reduce pollution, improve soil health and offer climate resilience whilst also potentially increasing yields and ensuring high-quality food production.

Westmorland and Furness' three major land-based industries are:

Farming and forestry	Conservation	Tourism
Farming, with forestry and other productive land management systems, contributes about £1.1 billion to the Cumbrian economy, which equates to 9% of the Gross Value Added (GVA). ⁶	Conservation, countryside management, outdoor heritage and culture lie within the 'Protected Land Management' sphere; the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership has recently measured natural capital at a value exceeding £1.6 billion c.13% of the Gross Value Added (GVA).	Tourism, which relies heavily on protected heritage and landscape, brings in 65 million visitor days, and £2.9 billion – about 25% of Gross Value Added (GVA).

In addition, a significant proportion of the catering and hospitality of the county is also linked to tourism and farming through extensive use of local produce, estimated as being around 25% of the total Cumbrian workforce.

⁵Industrial History of Cumbria (2019) Farming in Cumbria Today. Available at: <https://www.cumbria-industries.org.uk/farming-in-cumbria-today/#:~:text=The%20total%20farmed%20area%20in%20the%20county%20was,on%20average%202.4%20people%20%28England%E2%80%99s%20average%20is%202.8%29.> [29.07.2025].

⁶Enterprising Cumbria (2025) Going for Growth: Cumbria's Economic Strategy 2025 – 2045. Available at: <https://heyzine.com/flip-book/GoingForGrowth> [19.08.2025].

Town and Parish Councils

The Council is actively collaborating with town and parish councils to ensure that local priorities are addressed effectively and community voices are heard. Through sharing planned initiatives and available grants, as well as linking up and streamlining our environmental strategies, the Council supports town and parish councils in delivering services tailored to local needs. We also work closely with the Cumbria Association for Local Councils (CALC), which is a membership organisation run by local councils for the benefit of local councils, assisting councils in their day-to-day work and representing their interests. They are therefore well placed to help disseminate information to town and parish councils and the communities they serve, and encourage action to take place at the local level.

Vision for nature in Westmorland and Furness

The Nature Strategy establishes the strategic direction for how Westmorland and Furness Council will respond to the need to enhance, restore and create biodiversity and support local nature recovery in the area by 2035. This ten-year strategy will align with the expected timescale of the first Cumbria LNRS. The primary focus will be on the Council's own land and operations, as well as key habitats and species that occur outside our land holding that make Westmorland and Furness unique.

As one of the first strategies to align to the Cumbria LNRS, it is intended to set an example by targeting the Council's resources through partnership working for the greatest benefit. This strategy and our leadership on nature recovery and conservation demonstrates what can be achieved both independently and in collaboration to deliver positive changes for wildlife on the ground.

Our vision for nature in Westmorland and Furness therefore aligns directly with that of the Cumbria LNRS, which is:

“Cumbria’s natural environment is in landscape scale recovery, with a mosaic of wildlife-rich habitats that are managed sustainably to create a network that is resilient to climate change, helps plants and animals thrive, and provides valuable services to local communities and the economy.”



Biodiversity and the state of nature in Westmorland and Furness

Overview

Westmorland and Furness, like the rest of the UK, is experiencing a significant decline in biodiversity. Whilst we are home to a wide range of species and are often pictured as a wild landscape, sadly biodiversity remains under threat from habitat loss, changing land-use, invasive species, pollution and climate change. Whilst around 62% of Westmorland and Furness lies within a protected landscape (areas of land managed mainly for landscape conservation and recreation), the percentage of wildlife-designated areas within landscape-designated areas is 32%⁷.

Although we are seeing a decline in biodiversity in line with national trends, there are many opportunities in Westmorland and Furness for the Council to lead on, or support, local nature recovery.

Westmorland and Furness area	3,792 km²
Protected landscapes within Westmorland and Furness (km²)	2,499 km²
Protected landscapes within Westmorland and Furness (%)	65.9%

Westmorland and Furness is home to:

- 2 National Parks
- 2 National Landscapes
- 21 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- 2 Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- 3 Ramsar Sites (wetlands of international importance)
- 180 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- 1,019 County Wildlife Sites.



⁷This figure includes: Special Areas of Conservation; Special Protection Areas; Sites of Special Scientific Interest; National Nature Reserves; Limestone Pavement Orders; RSPB reserves; County Wildlife Sites; Cumbria Wildlife Trust Reserves; and Woodland Trust Sites.

What's the difference between types of designations?

Wildlife designations are strictly protected sites under the EU Habitats Directive and Bird Directive. They focus on the conservation of specific habitats and species. In contrast, landscape designations are designed to protect the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of an area, providing opportunities for public enjoyment and understanding.

By geography, we are the third largest unitary authority in England, with a total area of 3,754 km²⁸, and one of the most sparsely populated, home to just over 227,000 people. Westmorland and Furness includes substantial areas of the Lake District National Park, Yorkshire Dales National Park, Arnside and Silverdale National Landscape, North Pennines National Landscape and many sites with special conservation status. Cumbria is therefore well positioned to make an outsized contribution to national nature recovery and conservation in line with the Environment Act 2021⁹ and the Council feels we have a moral obligation to do so.

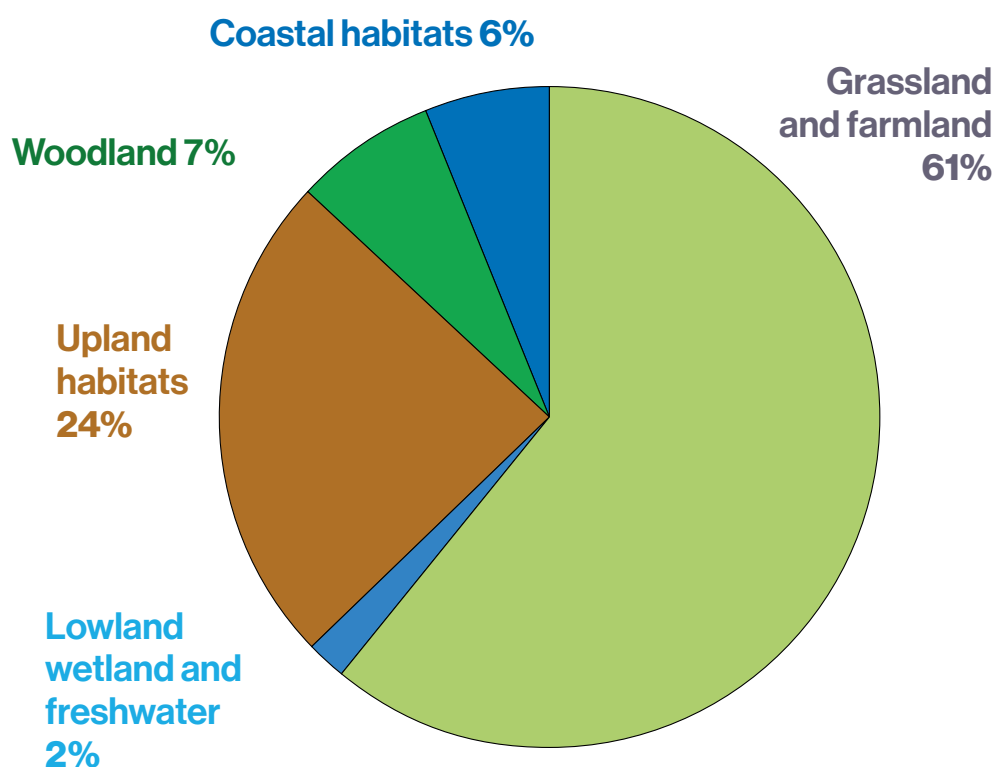


Figure 3: Proportion of main habitat types in Westmorland and Furness.

⁸Northern Housing Consortium (2023) Local Government Reorganisation: Three New Northern Unitary Authorities Launch. Available at: <https://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/blog/local-government-reorganisation-three-new-northern-unitary-authorities-launch/#:~:text=Westmorland%20and%20Furness%20Council%20has%20become%20England%E2%80%99s%20third,by%20area%2C%20providing%20services%20to%20approximately%2025%2C000%20residents.> [15.05.2025].

⁹GOV.UK (2021) Environment Act 2021. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents> [13.05.2025].

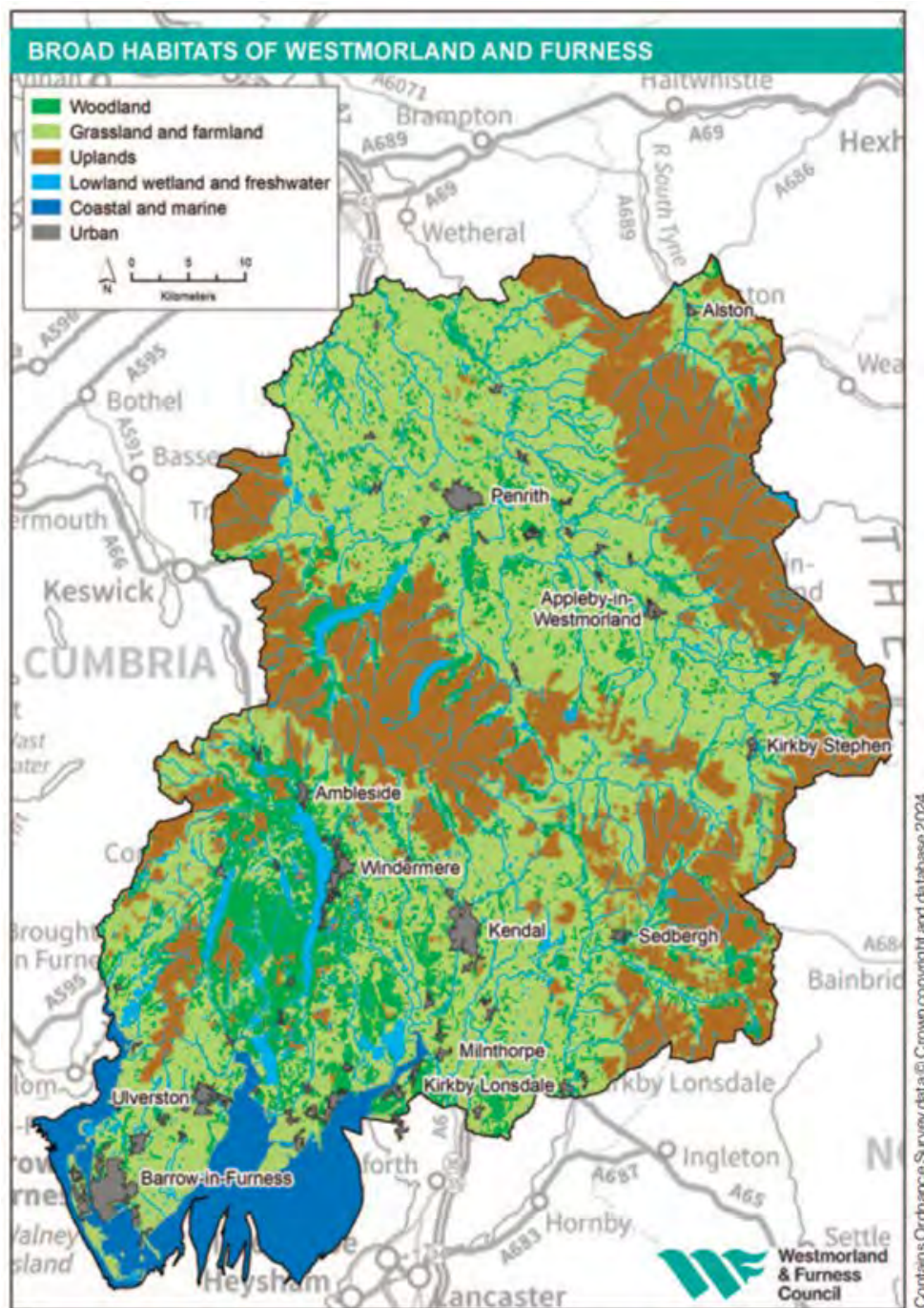


Figure 4: The main habitat types in Westmorland and Furness.

Westmorland and Furness' natural environment is diverse; it covers the coastal and estuarine habitats in the south around Morecambe Bay to the Lake District summit of Helvellyn at an altitude of 950 metres above sea level. The area is home to many different nationally important habitat types in a unique landscape, including: montane habitats such as heathlands; peat bogs; saltmarsh; woodlands (including ancient examples); grasslands including upland haymeadows and calaminarian grasslands; limestone pavement; and freshwater habitats such as lakes, rivers and tarns.



It would be unrealistic to propose nature recovery actions to benefit or support all habitats and species in Westmorland and Furness. This would not be possible within our available resources and not all habitats and species occur on our own land. Instead, we are aligning our priorities with the Cumbria LNRS and have selected actions for habitats and species based on whether they meet the following criteria:

- Habitats that can be directly enhanced, restored or created by Westmorland and Furness Council through statutory duties, partnership working, site management or engagement good practice.
- Habitats whose enhancement, restoration or creation would bring wider benefits, such as carbon sequestration, natural flood management or improve access to nature.
- Species which can be directly supported by Westmorland and Furness Council through statutory duties, partnership working, site management or engagement good practice.
- Native species that have significant populations throughout the area, or are viewed as a stronghold for a particular species in the UK.
- Non-native species that are considered to be a particular threat to native habitats and/or species within our area.



Causes of biodiversity loss

Despite a long tradition of valuing natural history and the environment, along with ongoing conservation efforts, many native habitats and species in the UK remain at risk or are experiencing declines in their populations or declines in their natural ranges. The causes of biodiversity loss are multiple, interlinked and often human-driven, but most importantly, are all reversible to some extent.

National causes of biodiversity loss include:

Habitat loss and fragmentation

Since the industrial revolution, hedgerows have been removed, woodlands cleared, and rivers straightened to make space for urban expansion and food and wool production. As habitats shrink and become isolated, species lose the special conditions and connectivity needed to survive.

Climate change

Rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events are disrupting ecosystems across England. Some species are moving northward or to higher elevations in search of suitable conditions, while others cannot adapt fast enough. Coastal habitats are at risk from sea level rise and increased storm surges, while freshwater ecosystems are vulnerable to drought and altered flow regimes.

Invasive non-native species

Plants and animals introduced from other regions - either intentionally or accidentally - have become invasive, in some cases outcompeting, preying on or transferring disease to native species. Common examples in Westmorland and Furness include the grey squirrel, American mink, signal crayfish, Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam.

Pollution

Chemical pollutants — from nitrogen and phosphorus to microplastics and heavy metals — affect air, water, and soil quality. Light pollution can also have an adverse impact on species because it disturbs the way plants and animals perceive daytime and night-time, disrupting their natural behaviour.

Land use

Since the Second World War, modern land use practices have significantly impacted biodiversity and continue to do so. Land is needed to build homes, to farm food and for timber production, and these activities form a significant part of Cumbria's economy. Although our land is facing multiple pressures, it is still possible for nature recovery to happen alongside these practices and contribute towards landscape-scale nature recovery.

Disease

Introduced pathogens, often unintentionally brought in through global trade or human movement, can be particularly devastating to native species that have no natural immunity. In some cases, disease outbreaks can also disrupt food chains and reduce genetic diversity, making populations more vulnerable to future threats.

Human activity

Whilst it is rare for people to intentionally harm our natural environment, unintentional harm to wildlife is an issue across Cumbria where inappropriate human activity is leaving its mark on the landscape and is negatively affecting biodiversity. Examples include off-lead dogs, unpermitted access to sensitive areas, and wild camping and fires.

The loss of biodiversity in Westmorland and Furness is not due to a single cause, but the result of complex interactions between modern society and the natural world. Reversing this trend will require long-term thinking, integrated action and partnership working. Preserving nature is not just about saving rare species; it's about protecting the systems that support human life, health, and wellbeing.

The impacts of climate change on nature

Climate change is the long-term shift in global temperatures and weather patterns. Climate change causes a wide range of negative impacts including increased heat, drought, intense and frequent storms, and rising sea levels; these impacts consequently harm wildlife and damage habitats. Migratory species may be especially affected if the climate is changing rapidly on both their breeding and wintering grounds.

Climate change is happening, and the range of impacts associated with wetter winters and warmer, drier summers are evident. Examples include Storm Desmond in 2015, and 2022 being the UK's warmest year on record with areas of Westmorland and Furness observing temperatures exceeding 30°C¹⁰. As the frequency of extreme weather events increases, the risk of coastal and fluvial (river) flooding remains a concern as Westmorland and Furness is already one of the wettest regions in England. Summer rain may also become heavier in many places and increase the likelihood of surface water flooding, although total summer rainfall is expected to decline overall. These events may present risks to Westmorland and Furness' residents but are also likely to cause widespread damage to our environment through wildfires, landslides, flooding, and the drying out of habitats such as salt marshes and peat bogs.

¹⁰ Met Office (2025) 2024: provisionally the fourth warmest year on record for the UK. Available at: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/weather-and-climate-news/2025/2024-provisionally-the-fourth-warmest-year-on-record-for-the-uk> [09.06.2025].



Climate change is and will continue to impact upon our natural environment and landscape. The United Kingdom Climate Projections (UKCP) from 2018¹¹ predict the following changes relevant to Westmorland and Furness that have the potential to damage habitats, put species at risk or exacerbate the distribution and number of invasive non-native species:

- Greater temperature extremes.
- Hotter, drier summers increasing risk of wildfires.
- Wetter, warmer winters.
- More intense and frequent rainstorm events.
- Sea level rise causing coastal landscape change and flooding events.
- Summer soil and peat moisture content decreases.

The Council has a detailed climate and carbon management programme that will help support the delivery of this strategy. Biodiversity, climate change and climate adaptation are interconnected, with actions initiated for one purpose often bringing wider benefits elsewhere. Although biodiversity can be negatively affected by climate change, nature can play a positive role in climate mitigation and adaptation through the ecosystem services it supports.

Climate adaptation is one of the ways that we can respond to the risks presented by climate change. Whilst actions to reduce our emissions focus on reducing or preventing the chance of climate change driven events occurring, adaptation looks at how we can adjust our behaviour to prepare for and better cope with the climate change driven events that are already happening or are expected to happen. Westmorland and Furness Council's Climate Adaptation Strategy will help to ensure that we are identifying and responding appropriately to the risks posed by climate change, particularly those that cannot be prevented through carbon emissions reductions.

We are also working with our Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Team to explore nature-based initiatives that could reduce the risk and impact of flooding and coastal erosion, whilst improving local biodiversity.

A coordinated approach is essential. Safeguarding, conserving and enhancing biodiversity plays a vital role in tackling climate change and helps us adapt to the increasingly extreme weather we're already facing and to the more intense conditions we may face in future. At the same time, taking decisive action to limit further climate change will give nature a better chance to recover and thrive.



Habitats in Westmorland and Furness

Built environment



The built environment includes buildings, gardens, infrastructure, amenity areas and associated green spaces within settlements known collectively as green infrastructure. It also includes the wildlife-rich habitat of open mosaics on previously developed land which occurs mainly on brownfield sites.

Improving biodiversity through habitat enhancement, restoration and creation in the built environment increases habitat connectivity to allow species movement, but it also brings wider benefits to people. Areas covered in vegetation stay cooler than patches of concrete, stone or similar materials, and the cooling effect can be greater if there's shade from trees. Urban greening is estimated to bring savings of almost £300 million a year to our towns and cities¹², reducing costs of cooling and helping people live comfortably through heatwaves.

There are 24 million gardens and allotments in the UK, which covers an area larger than all our National Nature Reserves combined. How we all tend to these can have wide reaching impacts as they play a vital role in reconnecting fragmented habitats and supporting wildlife.

The majority of our council-owned land is within the built environment, consisting predominantly of parks and open spaces, cemeteries, car parks, leisure pitches, roadside verges, smaller areas of amenity spaces and allotments. Existing buildings can also provide important habitats for a range of species.

Our largest settlements include Barrow-in-Furness, Kendal, Penrith, Ulverston, Windermere, Sedbergh and Kirkby Stephen, but there are numerous smaller towns, villages and hamlets throughout the area that present opportunities for habitats and species.

The Cumbria LNRS has two priorities for the built environment which we will endeavour to align our work with:

- **Priority 25:** Enhance the ecological value of our built environment, to maintain existing habitat, minimise fragmentation, and maximise further opportunities for biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and nature recovery, while meeting community needs.
- **Priority 26:** Create new wildlife-rich habitats in building developments in our built-up areas, creating a mosaic of interconnected habitats designed and managed for wildlife.

The actions in the action plan (Appendix A) focusing on the built environment will improve biodiversity in our more built-up areas and connect people with nature, whilst also considering the value of maintaining our community and amenity spaces for our residents.

¹²The Wildlife Trusts and Royal Horticultural Society (2023) Wild about lawns. Available at: https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/230306%20RSWT%20Wild%20about%20Lawns_Booklet%202023%20web%20no%20logo.pdf [15.05.2025].

Woodland and trees

This habitat type includes ancient, veteran and important trees; tree groups; blocks of woodland with associated deadwood and decay features; urban and street trees; traditional orchards; and hedgerows.



Woodland and trees provide multiple benefits to both people and nature. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has calculated an economic value for the UK's trees and woodlands at £382 billion¹³, based on the role they play in sequestering carbon, regulating temperatures, strengthening flood resilience, reducing noise and air pollution, and for public health benefits.

Table 1: The value of trees using figures taken from the ONS.

Greenhouse gases	Health and recreation	Air quality	Flood regulating	Urban heat regulating
UK woodlands sequestered 19.6 million tonnes of greenhouse gases, valued at £5.1 billion (based on the 2021 figure).	Annual health benefits from recreation in woodland were estimated at £1.1 billion.	UK woodlands removed over 316,000 tonnes of air pollutants worth an estimated £1.8 billion in avoided negative health impacts.	The annual value of trees in reducing flooding risk in the UK was estimated at £911 million.	The annual value of city trees in providing shade was estimated at £753 million.

Westmorland and Furness Council is responsible for trees along our highway network and all trees in the parks and open spaces that we maintain, including woodlands such as Scaws Wood in Penrith and School Knott Wood in Windermere. The Council's main activities are focused on public health and safety and managing tree-related diseases, however priority will also be given to retaining trees in Westmorland and Furness Council where in suitable locations, regardless of their age, size or conservation status, and to the appropriate maintenance of trees to maximise biodiversity benefits which generally accrue as trees get older.

We are also working closely with Raise and adopting their Forest Plan¹⁴; Raise bring together communities, landowners, policy makers and artists to co-create sustainable woodland in diverse landscapes to address the climate crisis and improve the health, wellbeing and opportunities of Cumbrian people.

¹³ONS (2024) Woodland natural capital accounts, UK: 2024. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/woodlandnaturalcapitalaccountsuk/2024> [15.05.2025].

¹⁴Raise (2025) Introducing the Cumbria Community Forest Plan. Available at: [Introducing the Cumbria Community Forest Plan | Raise: Cumbria Community Forest](#) [19.08.2025].



Tree planting opportunities will be explored where they will deliver multiple benefits including habitat connectivity or stepping stones for wildlife, continuous canopy cover, climate regulation, natural flood management and health and wellbeing benefits for our residents. A strategic approach will be taken for tree planting in line with the Cumbria LNRS and following the 'right tree, right habitat, right place' principle. Our actions will be focused on helping to deliver the following four priorities of the Cumbria LNRS which are related to woodland, trees and scrub:

- **Priority 8:** 70% (50,000 ha) of existing woodland to be under sustainable management practices which maintain and enhance biodiversity by 2035.
- **Priority 9:** Increase woodland and non-woodland tree cover in Cumbria by 10,000 ha by 2035, targeting the expansion of and improvement of connectivity between the existing woodland network.
- **Priority 10:** 75% (12,250 ha) of ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees are under sustainable management and are in or are moving towards good ecological condition by 2035
- **Priority 11:** Restore or create 1250 km of species-rich native hedgerows and 5000 ha of high nature conservation value scrub by 2035 and increase the amount of the existing resource that is under favourable management.

The actions in Appendix A of this document will focus on enhancing, restoring and creating woodland for climate and nature benefits, and will link closely to our Tree Strategy which will be published by the Arboriculture Team in the future.

Peatland

Peat is formed when waterlogged conditions prevent the decomposition of sphagnum moss and other plants resulting in a soil which is rich in organic matter. Peatlands are the habitats which occur on peat soils and are generally split into two categories: wetter habitats that occur on deep peat (e.g. blanket bog) and drier habitats that occur on shallower peat (e.g. wet heath). Peatland restoration typically focusses on deep peat habitats.

Almost all the UK's heathland and blanket bog habitats have been degraded through historical management regimes. When in poor condition, peatlands release carbon into the atmosphere, contribute to extreme rainfall-runoff events, contribute to poor water quality, and support fewer plant and animal species. When in good condition, peatlands:

- Store carbon instead of releasing it into the atmosphere
- Hold large amounts of water, helping to regulate water flows and reduce the severity of potential flooding.
- Reduce erosion and sedimentation of watercourses, improving water quality.
- Support some of our most valued species and form a distinctive part of Westmorland and Furness' landscape character.

Methods for restoring peatlands generally aim to restore natural processes using three key approaches:

1. Retaining water and sediment on site.
2. Increasing vegetation cover and species richness/diversity.
3. Enabling recovery through long-term management.



Calculating the area of peatland in Westmorland and Furness is complex as there are many different parameters that could be used to define 'peatland'. The Natural England Peaty Soils map estimates there to be 64,132 ha of deep peat in Westmorland and Furness. The Cumbria LNRS map estimates there to be 57,574 ha of blanket bog, heath, lowland raised bog, and fen, although this is not necessarily linked to peat depth. If restorable habitats or shallow peat and peaty pockets are included, there is estimated to be between 135,997 ha and 140,599 ha of peaty soils/restorable peatland habitats in Westmorland and Furness.

Westmorland and Furness Council do not own any large areas of peatland, but we are funding peatland restoration works on other areas in our area. These works are being undertaken by Cumbria Peat Partnership (CPP), which is a group of stakeholders with an interest in peatland habitats in Cumbria; they were established in 2013 and aim to share knowledge, develop best practice and actively support the restoration of all peat habitats in Cumbria. Since 2013 to the time of publishing this strategy, a total of 12,070 ha of peatland has been surveyed and 5073 ha has undergone restoration work.

Our actions will be focused on partnership work which helps to deliver the following four priorities of the Cumbria LNRS that are related to peatlands:

- **Priority 13:** Restore 10,000 ha of blanket bog and valley mire and maintain under restorative and sensitive management (resulting in good hydrological and biological condition) as part of a dynamic mosaic of upland habitats by 2035.
- **Priority 14:** Re-create 10,000 ha of heathland and have 90% of the existing resource under appropriate management as part of a dynamic mosaic of upland habitats by 2035.
- **Priority 15:** Restore, enhance and create 500 ha of montane habitats as part of a dynamic mosaic of upland habitats that are under appropriate management by 2035.
- **Priority 20:** Maintain, restore or enhance 3,250 ha of lowland raised bog, and 2,000 ha of lagg and wetland habitat to be in good condition and under appropriate management by 2035.

Grassland

Grasslands cover large areas of Westmorland and Furness, but most are modified by land management and used for agricultural purposes. Grassland as a wildlife-rich habitat type includes meadows, calcareous grasslands, acid grassland, calaminarian grassland, and coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, however semi-natural grasslands are scarce. Grassland also includes modified or amenity grassland which has the potential to become wildlife-rich through appropriate restoration activities, and which will be the primary focus of the actions the Council can take on our own land to increase biodiversity.

- **There are around 4.5 million hectares of grassland in England, of which just 100,000 ha are unimproved (grasslands that have never been ploughed, reseeded or heavily fertilised).**
- **The closely cut 'English lawn' was created in the 17th century and was a symbol of aristocracy or the upper classes.**



Grasslands are incredibly important to biodiversity and bring wider benefits. They have a huge carbon sequestration potential and UK grasslands are estimated to store two billion tonnes of carbon in their soils. As the risks associated with climate change such as wildfires increase, grasslands are considered a more reliable carbon store than woodlands because approximately 90% of their carbon is stored below ground¹⁵. Grasses also filter the air, trapping dust and other pollutants, and, when their roots are allowed to grow fully, they can reduce soil compaction to help minimise the severity of flooding through natural flood management.

Westmorland and Furness Council owns several 'grassy areas' including parks and open spaces, amenity spaces, cemeteries and leisure pitches. Although consideration must be made to their primary function as a community space, there are opportunities to make space for nature in these areas, such as through planting for pollinators to restore grasslands to be more biodiverse and support key species in our area.

Within Westmorland and Furness there are approximately 600km of special roadside verges, which represents an incredible resource for our wildlife¹⁶. Westmorland and Furness Council currently manages the majority of road verges throughout the area to ensure there is good visibility for road users whilst considering biodiversity.

We will also work with other organisations including town and parish councils to enhance grassland on other suitable land to provide a network of spaces with abundant food and habitat for insect species in line with Cumbria's Plan Bee¹⁷.

Our actions for grassland link to two particular Cumbria LNRS priorities, which we will be able to deliver against directly or potentially through partnership working. These priorities are:

- **Priority 16:** Maintain and enhance the existing extent of wildlife-rich¹⁸ grassland, with 75% (8,500 ha) under appropriate management and in good condition by 2035.
- **Priority 17:** Create or restore 2,850 ha of grassland to be wildlife-rich by 2035, creating an appropriately managed and connected network that increases the biodiversity of grasslands and soils.



¹⁵PlantLife (2023) Grasslands as a Carbon Store. Available at: <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Grasslands-as-a-Carbon-Store.pdf> [22.05.2025].

¹⁶Westmorland and Furness Council (2024) Caring for Westmorland and Furness' Roadside Verges. Available at: <https://www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-08/WFC%20Roadside%20Verges.pdf> [22.05.2025].

¹⁷Cumbria Local Nature Partnership (2023) Cumbria's Plan Bee: A pollinator action plan for Cumbria. Available at: <https://www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Cumbria-Pollinators-Strategy.pdf> [22.05.2025].

¹⁸Natural England (2024) Environment Act Habitat Target – Definitions and Descriptions (TIN219). Available at: [Environment Act Habitat Target – Definitions and Descriptions - TIN219](#) [10.09.2025].

Wetland and freshwater

Watercourses are among the most important wildlife corridors within our landscape, with catchments covering large areas which contribute greatly to our local landscape character.

Owing to its high levels of rainfall Westmorland and Furness ranks among the wettest regions in the UK, in combination with the diverse range of soils, rocks and geological features that make up our area, the wet climate results in a diverse array of wetland and freshwater habitats. The Eden and Kent rivers are the longest watercourses in the Westmorland and Furness area, while Windermere and Ullswater are the largest lakes, contributing towards a unique landscape that is ecologically rich and holds special significance for local communities.

There are multiple other water bodies in Westmorland and Furness including canals, tarns, ponds and marshes that provide further habitats for wildlife, and our freshwater habitats are home to species such as Atlantic salmon, white-clawed crayfish, freshwater pearl mussel and otter.

For our wetland and freshwater habitats to function as they should, they need a high standard of water quality, and be in good physical and ecological condition; for rivers this includes the full range of natural processes like erosion, deposition and connection to floodplains. Restoring natural processes can slow the flow of water through a catchment, increasing the amount of water stored upstream and reducing the impacts of flooding in our built-up areas through natural flood management; restoring natural flows can also provide resilience to drought. Nature-based solutions will be an essential part of increasing our resilience to the impacts of climate change.

We are working with other organisations and partnerships to improve the condition of our wetland and freshwater habitats, such as through the Love Windermere Partnership and the Cumbria Catchment Partnership. Our actions further link to Cumbria LNRS priorities, including:

- **Priority 19:** Restore natural processes and hydrology to our wetland and freshwater habitats, with 200 km of rivers restored, connected to their floodplains, and 500 ha of good quality riparian, lake shore, and wetland habitat created by 2035.
- **Priority 20:** Maintain, restore or enhance 3,250 ha of lowland raised bog, and 2,000 ha of lagg and wetland habitat to be in good condition and under appropriate management by 2035.
- **Priority 21:** Improve water quality in wetland, freshwater, coastal and estuarine habitats, and reduce diffuse and point source water pollution, with 99% of waterbodies and coastal waters in good ecological condition and 25% in good chemical condition by 2035.

Coastal and estuarine

Coastal habitats are found wherever the land meets the sea. Westmorland and Furness has over 110km of coastline from our westernmost boundary near Broughton-in-Furness, south to Barrow-in-Furness then due east to Grange-over-Sands and Arnside. Westmorland and Furness' coastal habitats include sand dune systems, cliffs, saltmarsh and seagrass beds. All our coastline is either a Special Protection Area or Special Area of Conservation, recognising the national and international importance of these habitats and some of the species they support, including tern and gull species around Foulney Island and South Walney.



Our coastal ecosystem is valuable for its assemblage of species and habitats, for the pleasure it brings to people, and for the ecosystem services it provides us with. However, like much of the UK, we are facing challenges in our coastal and estuarine environments, with coastal erosion, recreational disturbance and coastal squeeze a particular concern in Westmorland and Furness. Alongside recreational disturbance, overgrazing of saltmarsh is one of the main reasons these habitats around Morecambe Bay are in such poor condition¹⁹ and are unable to support the full range of expected species, including plants, birds and invertebrates.

Westmorland and Furness Council is a Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Authority, which means we have a duty to lead on coastal erosion risk management activities, as well as developing Shoreline Management Plans to provide a long-term holistic framework for managing the risk of coastal change on our sections of coastline.

Our actions in Appendix A will link closely to the priorities in the Cumbria LNRS for coastal and estuarine habitats, which include:

- **Priority 21:** (as per wetland and freshwater chapter): Improve water quality in wetland, freshwater, coastal and estuarine habitats, and reduce diffuse and point source water pollution, with 99% of waterbodies and coastal waters in good ecological condition and 25% in good chemical condition by 2035.
- **Priority 22:** Restore 750 ha of coastal habitats by 2035 and maintain or enhance 75% (7,000 ha) to be in good condition and under appropriate management.
- **Priority 23:** Expand the space available to coastal transitional habitats and restore coastal processes, enabling them to be dynamic and move inland in response to natural processes and climate change.
- **Priority 24:** Increase our understanding of the threats and pressures on the marine environment, and the potential actions that may be needed to address these.



Priority species

The rich and varied landscape of Westmorland and Furness is home to a wide range of flora and fauna, many of which are priority species and are therefore considered to be of particular importance for conservation. These species are often indicators of habitat health, biodiversity richness or ecological change, although they can also be impacted by climate change, persecution, pollution, disturbance, and invasive non-native species.

There are over 700 species in Cumbria which are threatened, near-threatened or of local significance - Cumbria LNRS (2025).

Protecting priority species in Westmorland and Furness is not just about individual animals or plants, it is about preserving a complex web of life and the habitats that sustain them. Species recovery work is deeply collaborative, involving local communities, farmers, non-governmental organisations, and statutory bodies. It is through this collaboration that the Cumbria LNRS has chosen 25 priority species or groups of species, and has one overarching priority on species recovery:

- **Priority 27:** Maintain, and where possible increase, the population size, extent, and diversity of Cumbria's key native species.

¹⁹Malpas et al. (2013) Continued declines of redshank tringa tetanus breeding on saltmarsh in Great Britain: Is there a solution to the conservation problem? Bird Study, 60(3), 370–383.

Where possible, we will align our species recovery efforts to this priority as well as considering the positive impact we can have on other native species in Westmorland and Furness. The priority species are in Table 2.

Table 2: Cumbria LNRS priority species.

Species	Taxon group	Presence in Westmorland and Furness
Eurasian red squirrel	Terrestrial mammal	Yes
Ricasolia amplissima	Lichen	Yes
Hageniella micans	Moss	Yes
Netted carpet moth	Insect – moth	Yes
Hazel dormouse	Terrestrial mammal	Yes
Willow gloves fungus	Fungus	No records for W&F
Waxcap fungi	Fungus	Yes
Breeding waders (curlew, lapwing, redshank and snipe)	Bird	Yes
Black grouse	Bird	Yes
Hen harrier	Bird	Yes
Arctic alpine plants	Flowering plant	Yes
Arctic charr, vendace and schelly	Bony fish	Yes
Atlantic salmon	Bony fish	Yes
Freshwater pearl mussel	Mollusc	Yes
White-clawed crayfish	Crustacean	Yes
European water vole	Terrestrial mammal	Yes
White faced darter	Insect - dragonfly	Yes
Rosy marsh moth	Insect – moth	Yes
Window-winged sedge	Insect – caddis fly	Yes
Natterjack toad	Amphibian	Yes
Northern dune tiger beetle	Insect - beetle	No records for W&F
St Bees seed-eater	Insect – beetle	No records for W&F
Small blue butterfly	Insect – butterfly	Yes
Common swift	Bird	Yes
Ringed plover	Bird	Yes



Benefits of nature and biodiversity

Wider benefits of nature recovery

Nature recovery goes far beyond protecting habitats and species; it has wide-reaching benefits for human health, the economy, and resilience in the face of climate change. As we re-establish natural systems, we begin to see a cascade of positive effects that touch every part of society.

In recent years, multiple studies have demonstrated the benefits of nature recovery, which include:

Social

- Physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits.
- Access to green open spaces.
- Natural noise management.
- Community cohesion and environmental stewardship.
- Revived traditional knowledge and cultural connections to the land.

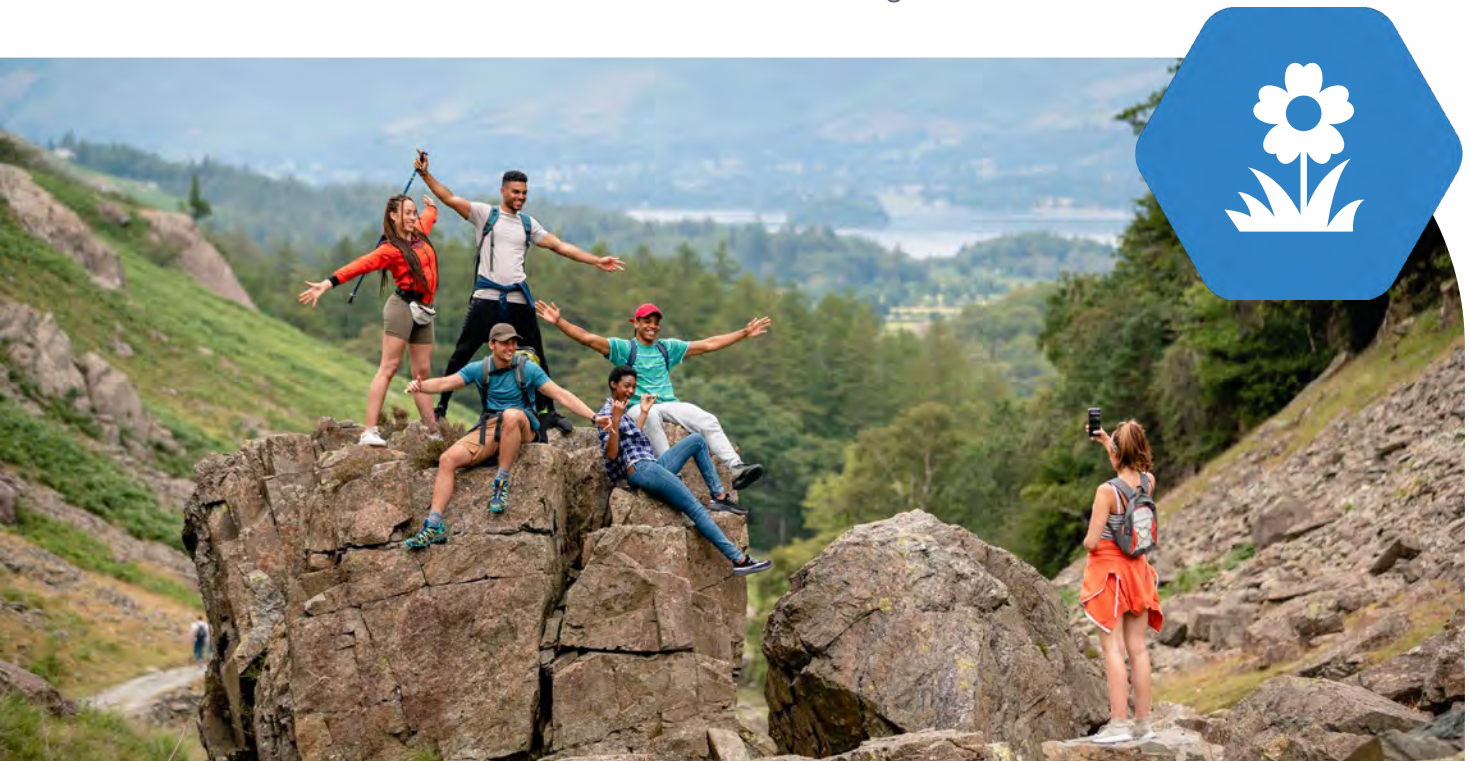
Economic

- Green jobs.
- Investment in natural capital.
- Enhanced long-term viability of agriculture and fisheries through ecosystem services.
- Sustainable tourism.

Environmental

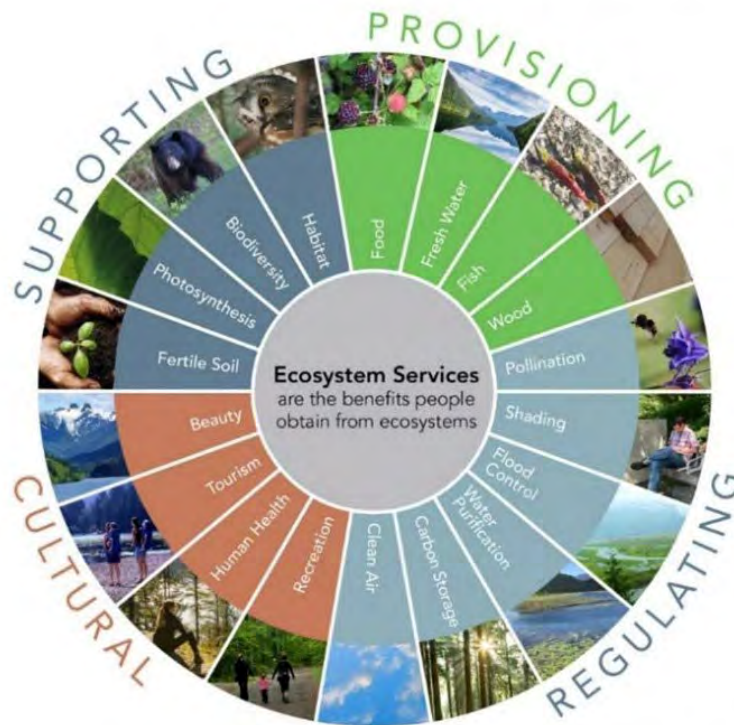
- Connected, wildlife-rich habitats.
- Carbon sequestration in our woodlands, peatlands, grasslands and wetlands.
- Reduction in flood risk.
- Improved water and air quality.
- Recovering pollinator populations.

²⁰Study of Critical Environmental Problems (1970) Man's Impact on the Global Environment: Assessment and Recommendations for Action. Cambridge: MIT Press.



Ecosystem services and nature-based finance

The term 'ecosystem services' was developed to recognise the benefits that ecosystems and the natural environment provide to society²⁰. Ecosystem service benefits fall into four categories²¹ shown in Figure 5 of supporting, provisioning, regulating and cultural.



Source: Metro Vancouver Regional Planning 2018

Figure 5: Common international classification of ecosystem services²².

According to the Office for National Statistics' UK Natural Capital Accounts, the estimated total value of ecosystem services in the UK in 2022 was £1.8 trillion²³. The largest contribution to the total asset value was health benefits from recreation in nature, with 20 million people's health and wellbeing benefitting from our natural environment at a value of £489 billion.

The cost of delivering nature recovery on the scale needed to address biodiversity loss and protect the ecosystem service benefits that society and the economy rely on cannot be met by public budgets alone. The Green Finance Institute estimates that there is a finance gap of between £13 billion and £32 billion to protect and restore biodiversity in the UK (Figure 6), with at least £9 billion of this being attributable to England alone²⁴.

²¹Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) Current state and trends assessment. Available at: <https://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/Condition.html#download> [09.06.2025].

²²Metro Vancouver (2018) Ecological Health Framework. Available at: <https://metrovancover.org/services/regional-planning/Documents/ecological-health-framework.pdf> [09.06.2025].

²³Office for National Statistics (2024) UK natural capital accounts: 2024. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/uknaturalcapitalaccounts/2024> [09.06.2025].

²⁴Green Finance Institute (2021) The Finance Gap for UK Nature. Available at: <https://www.greenfinanceinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-Finance-Gap-for-UK-Nature-13102021.pdf> [09.06.2025].

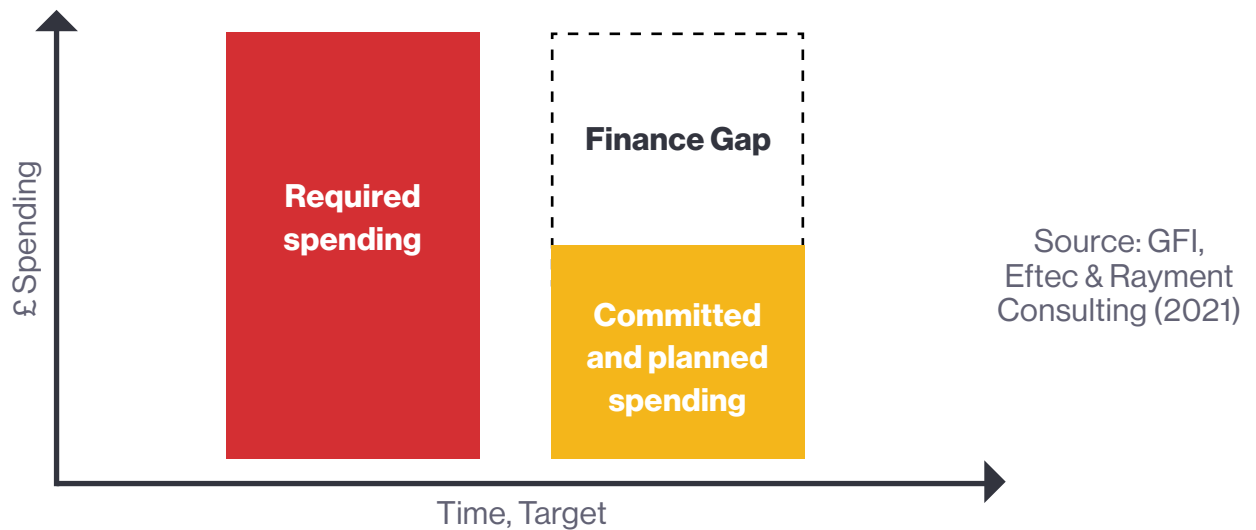


Figure 6: Finance gap to protect and restore biodiversity in the UK.

To address this funding gap, the Environmental Improvement Plan (2023) has a goal to raise at least £500 million in private finance to support nature's recovery every year by 2027 in England, rising to more than £1 billion by 2030²⁵.

Internationally, in the UK and in Westmorland and Furness, there is an emerging nature finance market, which aims to drive private green finance into nature recovery to help close this funding gap and deliver nature recovery on the scale required. Private green finance can include philanthropic giving, investment (where a return is expected), or purchasing nature credits²⁶. Nature credits can include voluntary credits, i.e. laws and policies do not require organisations to buy them, such as carbon credits, or mandatory credits, i.e. laws require organisations to buy them in certain circumstances, such as biodiversity net gain units.

Across Westmorland and Furness, there is a broad range of innovative nature finance projects underway, such as Ullswater Catchment Management CIC's project which seeks to attract private green finance to enable hedgerow, grassland and mixed wood pasture restoration or creation on farmland to improve biodiversity, air and water quality, and flood resilience while supporting viable farm businesses and food production.

There are also many existing funding streams available to land managers for nature recovery, including Agri-Environment Schemes, Farming in Protected Landscapes schemes and Higher Level Stewardship schemes. A significant amount of nature recovery work, particularly on farmland, will be funded through Defra grant funding until alternatives become available or readily accessible.

Policies, strategies and drivers

Effective and joined-up nature recovery and conservation requires a strategic, big-picture approach. Biodiversity conservation is influenced by a broad framework of international, national, and local legislation, policies, and guidance. Understanding how this strategy interrelates with wider strategic initiatives is essential.

²⁵Defra (2021) Environmental Improvement Plan. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64a6d9c1c531eb000c64ffa/environmental-improvement-plan-2023.pdf> [09.06.2025].

²⁶World Economic Forum (2024) Unlocking climate solutions at scale through blended finance. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/09/blended-finance-drive-climate-solutions/> [19.08.2025].

Figure 7 shows how key legislation, policies, strategies and other drivers, including those produced by the Council, relate to this Nature Strategy.

Figure 7: Legislation, policies, strategies and other drivers that relate to this strategy.

International

- Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (COP15)
- UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015)
- G7 2030 Nature Compact 2021
- IPCC AR5 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023



National

- Wildlife Legislation (Protected Species, Habitats and Designated Sites)
 - The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
 - The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000
 - Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2005 (as amended)
 - The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)
- UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework
- Making Space for Nature (2010) Prof Sir John Lawton
- 25 Year Environment Plan (2018)
- Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services
- England Peat Action Plan 2021
- England Trees Action Plan 2021 to 2024
- The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review (2021)
- Environment Act 2021
 - Strengthened Biodiversity Duty for Public Authorities
 - Local Nature Recovery Strategies
 - Mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain
- Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide (2023)
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2023)
- Environmental Improvement Plan 2023



Local

- Cumbria's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2025)
- Cumbria's Plan Bee Strategy (2023)
- Destination Management Plan for Cumbria: 2024 to 2030
- Going for Growth: Cumbria's Economic Strategy 2025 - 2045



Westmorland and Furness Council's Nature Strategy



Council

- Council Plan
- Council Plan Delivery Framework
- Active Travel programme
- Capital Strategy 2024 to 2029
- Carbon Management Strategy 2024 to 2029
- Climate Change Action Plan Part One and Two (2024)
- Local Plans

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) are another key framework that this strategy relates and connects to. These are 17 goals that provide a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future²⁷, and were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. Although this strategy will indirectly support multiple SDGs, the most pertinent are SDG 13 (take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts), SDG 14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, sea and marine resources for sustainable development) and SDG 15 (protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss).



²⁷United Nations (2025) The 17 Goals. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> [05.08.2025].



How we will deliver the Nature Strategy

Existing work

Westmorland and Furness Council has already undertaken several significant actions and initiatives to enhance or better manage biodiversity in the area, with some notable examples including:

- Being the responsible authority for Cumbria's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, aiming to begin to reverse the decline in biodiversity in Cumbria by enhancing, restoring and creating habitats in a strategic network over the next 3-10 years.
- Funding £900,000 worth of projects and initiatives through our Climate and Environment Partnership Grant, assisting nature recovery, managing the risks of climate change, and bringing wider benefits to our communities.
- Collaborating on the production of a Cumbria-wide nature Special Purpose Vehicle, known formally as Nature Net Gains, to support the development of nature recovery projects through creating and trading nature credits such as biodiversity net gain and nutrient neutrality.
- Conducting an assessment of our own land, comprising both desk study and field survey, to understand its ecological potential and determine what could be feasible in terms of habitat enhancement or creation to support the delivery of Nutrient Neutrality and Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Planting just over 42,000 trees towards our One Tree Per Resident target of 225,000 trees (17%), including through offering grants such as the Coronation Community Orchard Fund.
- Restoring more than 37 hectares of species-rich grassland and other pollinator-friendly habitat across 27 different sites through the Planting for Pollinators scheme in partnership with Cumbria Wildlife Trust.
- Publishing our invasive non-native species policy to set out how we will deal with invasive species on our own land and work in partnership to help reduce the distribution and impact of non-native species in the area.
- Developing our grey squirrel policy to help protect red squirrels, meet our legal requirements, and to help minimise economic losses to the forestry industry.
- Funding the survey of 71 sites through the County Wildlife Sites project in partnership with Cumbria Wildlife Trust.

Focus on... Local Investment in Natural Capital

In collaboration with Cumberland Council and Northumberland County Council, we are participating in Defra's Local Investment in Natural Capital Programme to explore how local authorities can facilitate investment in natural capital at the local level. As part of this programme, we are collaborating with Cumberland Council, Cumbria Wildlife Trust and the Lake District National Park Authority, to explore the business case for a habitat bank and nature brokerage to bring private green finance into Cumbria through creating, selling and brokering the sale of biodiversity net gain units and nutrient neutrality credits. In the future, there is an ambition for this to expand to carbon credits to support woodland creation, peatland restoration, saltmarsh and seagrass restoration and into natural flood management. Importantly, this project will support delivery of Cumbria's Local Nature Recovery Strategy and protect the natural capital and ecosystem service benefits enjoyed by the people who live, work and visit Westmorland and Furness.

Delivery mechanisms

To deliver the actions outlined in Appendix A of this strategy, we will adopt a collaborative place-based approach to work with our partners, communities, landowners and town and parish councils. We will align our efforts with local and national frameworks, including the Cumbria Local Nature Recovery Strategy, while embedding nature-based solutions into planning, land management, and economic development.

Westmorland and Furness Council will use the following delivery mechanisms:

- The Cumbria LNRS in partnership, through collaborations such as the Cumbria Local Nature Partnership, the Love Windermere Partnership and the Lake District National Park Partnership.
- Statutory functions such as planning, biodiversity net gain, nutrient neutrality and tree protection.
- Compliance with relevant legislation, including the enhanced biodiversity duty and other wildlife legislation.
- Funding opportunities, such as those that directly support local habitats, species or through other emerging local nature markets.
- Embedding the consideration of biodiversity impacts into council operations and services, through inclusion in service area plans and strategies, risk registers and Cabinet reports.
- Through our partners, supporting engagement with farmers and landowners.
- Cross-service engagement to share learning opportunities and good practice.
- Supporting and enabling locally led initiatives.
- Ecological surveys on key sites to assess their condition and explore the potential of green finance to support and secure long-term nature recovery.
- Engaging with and inspiring our residents to take action for biodiversity through wider communications and engagement.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

The Environment Act 2021 makes it a legal requirement that all development results in a biodiversity uplift of 10%, unless it is exempted from the rules. As the local planning authority, the council must make sure that all planning applications comply with the biodiversity net gain regulations set out in the Environment Act. These requirements should help to address biodiversity losses as a result of development and access to nature for local residents by prioritising the replacement of biodiversity features on the development site as a first resort. However, gains can also be delivered off-site through habitat banks which have the potential to result in bigger, better and more joined-up spaces for nature. As a planning authority and Conservation Covenant Responsible Body, the council has a key role to play in securing BNG habitat banks. In certain areas of Westmorland and Furness, BNG habitat banks can bank Nutrient Neutrality credits, resulting in even greater environmental and economic benefit as well as helping us to increase opportunities for green finance and forge closer links with the agricultural sector.

Funding

A key factor in successfully delivering the Nature Strategy for Westmorland and Furness is securing sufficient funding. Achieving our vision for nature recovery will require not only a supportive policy framework, strong political commitment, and robust partnerships, but also the necessary financial and staffing resources. Investment is essential to carry out the actions identified in this plan and to ensure the long-term benefits for people, nature, and climate resilience are realised.

We are committed to exploring any viable funding or grant opportunities to support the delivery of the actions within this strategy and the Council's Annual Plan; we will look to maximise existing budgets and resources to deliver biodiversity improvements both on our own land and through collaboration. However, we also acknowledge that Council funding alone will not be sufficient. That is why we will work proactively with a wide range of partners, including farmers, landowners, non-governmental organisations, and both public and private sector bodies, to access external funding streams, pool resources and attract investment.

Emerging nature finance tools, such as biodiversity net gain, carbon markets, and other natural capital approaches present major opportunities for funding local nature recovery. Several actions in this strategy are specifically designed to ensure Westmorland and Furness can benefit from these mechanisms. We are already building capacity and partnerships to help us become a leader in nature-based investment, recognising the need for a diverse and resilient funding strategy towards landscape-scale recovery in Cumbria.

Decision-making

Many of the actions outlines in Appendix A have been agreed as appropriate actions that the Council can take or can initiate through partnership working. As funding may change or new scientific research is published, some of the actions will require additional investigation and formal decision-making to ensure that the actions or projects are both effective and aligned with broader environmental, social, and economic goals. Strategic decision-making by members and through officer recommendations will help guide the prioritisation of resources, the selection of priority actions, and will continue the engagement of key stakeholders. Therefore, some of the actions in Appendix A will be subject to formal Cabinet approvals.

Want to know more and have your say?



- Sign up for our quarterly Climate and Nature Newsletter – QR code
- Engage with our key partnership for nature, the Cumbria Local Nature Partnership, by visiting their website and signing up for regular updates - [Home - Cumbria Local Nature Partnership](#)
- Another key partnership we are involved in is the Lake District National Park Partnership, you can find out more on their website - [Lake District National Park Partnership : Lake District National Park](#)
- We are also working closely with the Love Windermere Partnership to bring about a healthier future for the lake and the surrounding area. Updates on progress and how to get involved can be found on their website: [Love Windermere](#)
- But we cannot do it alone; we rely on many community partners, and encourage new communities to come together to help. The 'Biodiversity in the Community' toolkit can help with ideas - [Biodiversity in the Community](#)
- We'd love to hear from you, what you are doing to support nature recovery, or any ideas that you have that the Council could help with. Please email: **ClimateAction.WAF@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk**



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

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If you require this document in another format (e.g. CD, Braille or large type) or in another language, please telephone: **0300 373 3300**.

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